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THE TRUMPET OF GIDEON

BY THE REV. ARTHUR MERCER

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THE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

THE endeavor is often made to attract attention to the New Church by pointing out the greatness of Emanuel Swedenborg as a man. We are congratulated at the mention of him by the famous of the earth, and signs of his influence in the books which many read are eagerly treasured. We are called upon to find encouragement in the recent recognition of his preëminence in science by the learned in his own land. His unequalled attainments as civil engineer, statesman, philosopher, seer, and theologian, are dwelt upon.

These things are indeed remarkable. But in all these things he shares eminence with other men. Not by one or by all these attainments, could there be established a New Church. A Luther may accomplish the Reformation; a leader of men may establish a sect in the church; it is the Lord alone who establishes the church itself. The essential, therefore, in the establishment, through Swedenborg, of the New Church lies in none of the vast attainments of the man, but solely in the fact that he was called of the Lord to receive and publish the Heavenly Doctrines by which is founded the "Crown of all the churches."

"*The Second Coming of the Lord takes place by means of a man . . . whom He has filled with His spirit, to teach the doctrines of the New Church through the Word from Him . . . The Lord has manifested Himself before me, His servant, and sent me to this office . . . From the first day of that call, I have not received anything which pertains to the doctrines of that church from any angel, but from the Lord alone while I have read the Word.*"

This is the one important thing. To this end ministers the wonderful mental equipment, the long training, the stupendous attainment of the man; to this end too is the long-time intromission into the spiritual world, the seeing and hearing things of heaven and of hell. All this that he might be the fit instrument to receive and publish the doctrine of the New Church from the Lord.

In different ages, different instruments are chosen of the Lord to perform His will in the establishment of the church. To establish the Jewish Church, Moses and the prophets are called. To establish the Christian Church the Lord takes humanity upon Him, and Himself lives as man among men. The New Church is established through His servant Emanuel Swedenborg.

In every case that which establishes the church is the message from the Lord. And the New Church is established in us, when we receive the message of revelation through Old Testament Prophet, New Testament Evangelist, and the Theological Writings of Swedenborg, not as the opinion of man, but as from the Lord alone.

THE TRUMPET OF GIDEON.

A SERMON PREPARATORY TO THE HOLY SUPPER.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR MERCER,

PASTOR OF THE NEW CHURCH SOCIETY AT BALTIMORE, MD.

"*Then all the Midianites and the Amalikites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the* LORD *came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet.*"—JUDGES vi. 33, 34.

THE idea of bread as the type of the sustaining good of the Divine truth is closely associated with Gideon. He was threshing wheat in the wine-press to hide it from the Midianites when the angel of the Lord came to him to give him his commission as the saviour of Israel. And in the dream of the man in the camp of Midian, the sword of Gideon was pictured by a loaf of bread, that fell against the tent of the enemy and smote it.

The story is a parable and it was written for us. For here is Israel, the church, or the men of the church,—the people who are trying in the face of discouragement and temptation to emphasize the spiritual element in life, and there on the other side

of the green valley, disputing the possession of the fertile and fruitful tracts of life, is Midian and his associate tribes,— the Midianite horde, compared to grasshoppers in multitude, or, as the word is translated in the Revised Version, a vast swarm of locusts, settling down upon the fair face of the land of Israel to blight it. How plainly these human locusts represent the modern plague of materialism, the sensuous scientific faculties of the mind swarming over the face of nature and of the Word,—the disposition to estimate all the facts of life from the standpoint of the senses alone.

How perfectly, in the vivid Divine language of correspondence, this story of Gideon depicts the situation of the New Church to-day in the midst of her enemies. We are now in the thick of a struggle involving the very principle of Revelation as a controlling factor in the souls of men.

It may safely be averred that the chief impediment to the progress of the New Church to-day among the millions of humanity is its insistence upon the Bible as the truth of the living God,—that behind all the apparent imperfections of the external form there is a spiritual sense, which makes it Divine. We have learned how ready is the average man to scout this doctrine, and anyone who has had any experience proselyting for the New Church, knows how vast and impervious is the impact of forces arrayed against us.

And so this story of Gideon comes home to us laden with encouragement and flashing with inspiration. It points the glory and the mission of the New Church.

For what means Gideon for us,—called by the angel, "Thou mighty man of valor," threshing out the wheat in the wine-press? What but the power of a living, valorous, and struggling faith, storing away the pure grain of the good of life in the very wine-press of temptation?

The cohorts of a deified naturalism, the enemies of Divine Revelation, are gathered together against us, "but," listen! "The spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet."

What a thrilling note of prophecy and triumph we have here! We recall the splendid passage where Swedenborg explains the meaning of the angel sounding the trumpet, in the eighth chapter of the Apocalypse. "Hence then it is," he says, "that the sounding of the trumpet signifies the flowing down of the Divine truth out of heaven." (Apocalypse Explained, No. 502.) The proclamation of the truth of Divine Revelation, exultant from the regenerate soul of the church! What may not happen when the message of the New Church goes reverberating through the world like that?

You will notice how strongly emphasized is the *super*natural element in this parable of Gideon. First there was the visit of the angel by the wine-press, and then—the spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon, *before* he blew his trumpet that gathered the tribes to him.

Do you think that the New Church has received

this outpouring of the Divine Spirit, or are we yet but threshing the wheat in the wine-press? Are we blowing a mighty blast from the spirit of God in our souls, or are we but tooting a puny note from our own spirit? Does not this story grow upon you as the prophecy of something that is not but is yet to be?

You remember how Gideon dispersed the enemy; the choosing of the capable three hundred; the strange weapons they used; the trumpets in their right hands, and in their left the empty pitchers, which they broke at the critical moment, showing the flames of hidden lamps within.

These pitchers were fragile vessels of clay and easily broken. We know well enough of what common clay the Letter of the Word is made; these earthly vessels of Divine truth, intended to hold for us the baptismal water of the truth of practical living. Many of these stories and statements have no practical meaning or value regarded only in a literal way. Mere empty pitchers! Break them up; dissect them; as history, as science, as ethics, they are of no importance; as such cast them aside if you will, but in your hand remains the light of an inner meaning.

We of the New Church are very expert in breaking these empty pitchers. The understanding of the church is illumined and doing its part well, and, in the increase of the common knowledge of what crude and imperfect material the mere outer shell of the Word is made, and the consequent growth of unfaith in the Bible as the truth of God, it is a glorious thing

that we of the New Church can hold up before men's eyes, in the breaking of the empty shells, the inner light of the spiritual sense in proof of its Divinity.

And so we go flashing our lamps in the dark of the world's spiritual sight, but somehow the world does not heed. What then is lacking? Do we not know that it was not the breaking of the pitchers and the showing of the lamps, but the mighty, concerted blast of those three hundred trumpets that awoke, and startled, and dispersed the Midianites?

As the left hand with its empty pitcher and its light represents the intellect and its work, so the right hand with its trumpet pictures the function of the will, the heart,—the proclamation of the truth of Divine Revelation from the upsurging love of the regenerate soul of the church, full of the living spirit of the truth.

We frequently hear and read suggestions as to increasing the efficacy of the organized New Church as a missionary body,—changes recommended to popularize the church.

It is likely that, on the whole, we are now doing the best that we can do with the spirit that is in us. Nor have I any sympathy with the view that the New Church, I mean, especially, this New Church doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures, is destined always to maintain its present slow rate of progress, owing to the essential constitution of the world around us. I believe that the trouble is in us and in our spirit, and that the Lord is holding back from us our empowerment from on high, because,—we are not ready.

It is certain that we cannot successfully proclaim a truth so Divine and splendid, from our own spirit. May we not then confidently look forward to a day of Pentecost for the New Church, its formal consecration and empowerment by the Holy Spirit, as distinct and valid as that great day of the early church, when "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire" which sat upon the disciples? Yea, as far more significant and potent than that as that was external and temporary, and this will be internal and permanent because coincident with the rational regeneration of the church.

And there will come a race of men so voided of their pride of opinion and selfishness, and so subservient to the movings of the Divine Spirit, that it *can* possess them, and they will speak with tongues of fire, and they will sound the trumpet-blast of the New Church, proclaiming the living truth of God's Word, with so much of God's own mighty love for the saving of human souls, with such depths of insight and sympathy, with such sincerity of conviction, with such length and breadth of knowledge and illustration, and with such moving eloquence, that the world will be constrained to heed and will yield its homage to the essential verities of the New Jerusalem. Then will the church blow its trumpet and it will not break its pitchers and show its lamps in vain, and the influences of naturalistic thinking and living will break and roll away like the mists of night before the rising sun.

It was pointed out in the beginning of this sermon how deeply the idea of the nourishing and sustaining bread of life was inwrought in this story of Gideon. It was especially connected with the striving part of the story. And perhaps what I have said thus far points you too far a look-ahead and you need something for your present behoof. But if my interpretation of this story is right, it should be a thought of exultation in our hearts. It is the thought that we have a Divine commission and a glorious future for our church, and though we may garb ourselves in the sackcloth and ashes of penitence, yet it is in this exultant spirit that I would have you approach the Lord's table.

And if the Lord would feed us from the living truth of His Word as the bread of life, is it not that we may the better work and live towards this splendid future that our children and our children's children may inherit?

And whatever may be the defect of spirit and life of which we are deeply, desperately conscious, truly we have yet great cause of rejoicing in being here to-night. For ours it is to enjoy the greatest gift of God to man in this age, the opening out upon our mental vision of the Divine light of the spiritual sense of the Word. This is the burning lamp within the vessels of truth, that seem so empty to others.

And while we have been dealing with this symbol, my thoughts have moved along the tread of the centuries backwards, and we seem to be standing on the mount with the three disciples, where the Word

made flesh was transfigured before them, and His raiment became shining, exceeding white, and Peter said unto Him: "Master, it is good for us to be here." (Mark ix. 5.)

We are standing with the Lord to-day on the mount as witnesses of His transfiguration, while the glory of His truth shines out so glistering white through the translucent symbols of His Word. And though the New Church be so small and obscure and seemingly impotent now, is there any blessing that this world can give, that you would take in exchange for your New Churchmanship?

It is true of our Lord in His Second Coming as in His first, that the Son of Man "must suffer many things and be set at nought," (Mark ix. 12), yet will we say with Peter of old: "Master," (that is, Teacher), "it is good for us to be here."

Bible Lessons: Jud. vi.; *Matt.* xvii.

"Evangelization is annunciation concerning the Lord, His Advent, and concerning the things which are from Him, which belong to salvation and eternal life: and as all things of the Word, in its inmost sense, treat of the Lord alone, and also all things of worship represent Him, therefore the whole Word is the Gospel, in like manner all worship which is carried on according to the things commanded in the Word."—SWEDENBORG: "Heavenly Arcana," No. 9925.

THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSON FOR DECEMBER 24, 1905.

Isaiah ix. 1-7. *Read Isa.* xi. 1-10.

NO MORE GLOOM IN ZEBULUN AND NAPHTALI.

THE rendering of the Authorized Version leaves the opening verse of Isa. ix. somewhat obscure. See the much simpler, clearer Revised Version: "But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish," etc. The gloom, vexation, and affliction of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali refer historically to the anguish and captivity to be visited upon Israel for her idolatry, the sin of Jeroboam. (I Kings xii. 30). When, however, we read this and the prophet's words that follow, we cannot help seeing here a prediction of the coming of the Lord. By the spirit of God Isaiah spake or wrote better than he knew, his inspired words carrying far forward into the future—to the days of Cæsar Augustus and the birth of the Holy Child. And within the letter is its spirit or higher truth giving us something more than an historical allusion to the coming of the promised Messiah. (Read Matt. iv. 15-17).

The doctrines of the New Church reveal to us the truth that Zebulun (literally, "conjunction" or "dwelling together") and Naphtali ("strugglings") stand for well-defined elements and states in the development of human character. These two tribal divisions of the Divinely representative land formed the principal parts of Galilee; and Galilee as the third lowest in the series of Judah, Samaria, and Galilee, typifies the outmost or natural plane of life in which the ultimate works of man's regeneration are accomplished. During the early stages of regeneration, with their times of storm and stress, their repentance and reformation, the spiritual Galilee is often in gloom, and sorrow, and strugglings. Times of temptation are times of spiritual darkness. Recall the darkness in Egypt (Ex. x. 22); the Psalmist's words, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places" (Ps. lxxxviii. 6); and "there was darkness over all the land" (Matt. xxvii. 45). Temptations are the means through which, in the process of our regeneration, the lower and natural man is brought into harmony and correspondence with the higher or spiritual man. The promise, then, that there would be no gloom in the troubled land signifies that for those who are faithful in righteousness there will come a time when the darkness of temptation will no longer be over them, and that it will be theirs to enjoy the great light of clear perceptions of truth accompanied by the blessings of goodness and peace. This was exemplified, in the highest or inmost meaning of this passage of the Word, in our Lord's own

glorification; for this effected the unition in Himself of the Divine with the Human.

This spiritual meaning of Naphtali and Zebulun helps us to understand other passages where their names occur. Naphtali is "a hind let loose," (Gen. xlix. 21), because he represents the good affections of the natural man enjoying perfect freedom, as a stag when free ranges the forests, meadows, and hills. The "strugglings" of our earlier stages of regeneration are intended to lead to the most blessed and delightful freedom. "Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah...in the God of my salvation...He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and will make me to walk upon my high places" (Hab. iii. 19). Zebulun stands for that "dwelling together" (Gen. xxx. 20) or conjunction which follows victory in temptations; it is the heavenly marriage between truth and goodness of life. With the help of the suggestions given above as to the significance of Naphtali and Zebulun, let the student of this lesson see if he can tell why these were the two tribes sent out alone to fight against Sisera (Judges v. 18); why they are mentioned in Psalm lxviii. 27, and why our Lord dwelt in Capernaum, "in the borders of Zebulun and Nephthalim." (Matt. iv. 13-15).

GREAT LIGHT AND GREAT JOY.

Verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 (see the better reading of 5 in the Revised Version) continue the general thought of victory after temptation and of blessings bestowed therewith. The words apply in particular to our Lord and His coming; but they refer also to many

in the spiritual world who dwelt in a sort of "shadow of death" previous to the Advent, and to all in every age and state who are redeemed by Him. For we are taught: "The Lord came into the world principally on account of these two things,—to remove hell from angel and man, and to glorify His Human; for before the advent of the Lord, hell had grown up so as to infest the angels, and by interposition between heaven and the world, to intercept the communication of the Lord with the men of the earth." (True Christian Religion, No. 579.) When that "shadow" was removed, "a great light" took its place and brought great joy to all in the heavens. See Luke ii. 10, 13. This is perhaps the most important part of our rational basis for rejoicing in the Christmas season. For consider how many more myriads upon myriads of souls in the heavens were benefited by the Advent than were affected by it on earth. Another fact regarding the Lord's coming we should not miss: He came and still comes as the Word. Whenever the clouds or letter of the Word is opened at this day, so that the Lord appears therein, there is a new enlightenment from Him, which is His coming. His mere presence, however, which enlightens a man's understanding to a greater or less extent, is perpetual with all, both the evil and the good. But this enlightenment is only like the light of the sun in Fall or Winter. In order that the opening of the Word may be a genuine coming of the Lord to men to-day, there must be in the daily life a conjoining of faith and love in good works. Then there comes "a great

light" indeed, to the soul, that may be compared to Spring-time light with heat in it causing the earth to blossom forth and bear fruit.

REJOICING IN VICTORY.

The multiplying of the nation, the increasing of joy as the joy of harvest, and as when men divide the spoil of their enemies, are several ways of expressing the spiritual multiplication and enrichment of the soul that truly receives the Lord in His coming.

Spiritual multiplication is very much the same as spiritual fruitfulness. Compare Gen. ix. 7. But multiplication refers to the increase of truths and wisdom in the regenerate life, while fruitfulness refers to the increase of goodness and love. The latter is accompanied by "the joy of harvest"—the happiness of a righteous and useful life; for good uses are represented especially by the produce of the fields. This happiness, however, is not attained without struggle and combats with evil; and it is fitting that there should be rejoicing after victory over spiritual foes.

The "spoil" may be thought of as the faculties and possibilities for good which are thus saved from abuse and destruction. Such victory is meant in verse 4 by the breaking of the yoke, staff, and rod of oppression, as in the days when the Midianites were so signally defeated by Gideon. (Judges vii. 15 ff). The yoke is typical of a particularly hard form of oppression, since it rests upon the neck; and the neck, as the all-important medium of communication between the brain and other parts of the body, stands in our

spiritual life for influx from and conjunction with heaven. If this be shut off; if one allows his spiritual enemies to yoke his spiritual neck, it is evident that the spiritual life is in great danger.

. The Midianites were robbers and destroyers of Israel's fields when just ready for harvest; and surely there are no evils more annoying or oppressive than those which rob our lives of the fruits of any good efforts we may have made as spiritual husbandmen. But the encouraging promise is here given us that with the coming of the Lord the power of such evils symbolized in its various forms by yoke, staff and rod, can be broken.

Verse 5 is much more intelligible in the Revised Version. The armor of the battle and garments rolled in blood shall be for burning and fuel of fire, means that the false ideas, the lies and calumnies, which our spiritual enemies bring against us shall be dissipated. Their perversions of the truth and of good life, like garments rolled in blood, will be consumed in the hell-fire of their own passions. This is done for the sake of the protection of the heavens and of men on earth. It is a part of the judgment and redemption that comes with the advent of "the true light," whether we think of the human race as a whole or of the individual soul at the present day. Thus, in many ways the character of the Messiah is revealed to us in the inner meaning of verses 1 to 5, although the Lord's name does not appear until we reach the sixth verse. It is all an expression of His love and His redemptive power—of light after

darkness, of blessed relief after struggle and temptation, of happy enjoyment of goodness and freedom after spiritual oppression.

THE DIVINE NAMES OR QUALITIES.

In the Word, from the naming of the animals by Adam to the last mention of the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation, names signify spiritual qualities. The six names here given to Him therefore furnish an unusually good opportunity to learn something of the Messiah's or the Lord's Divine character. The names are: Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty One or Hero, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. The holy Child born of the Virgin Mary was indeed "Wonderful." His conception was miraculous, and His life unique, since it made the invisible God visible among men. His redemptive work and the Divinely unselfish love shown in it is almost incredible in its wonders. He is "Counsellor," too,—the Divine Lawgiver and infinitely wise Adviser. The spirit of wisdom, understanding, and counsel was upon Him (Isa. xi. 2) the spirit of that counsel which "standeth forever." Nor was He like the human counsellor who gives advice, but often stands aloof and does not demonstrate the righteousness he preaches. Jehovah—Jesus our Lord was the perfect Exemplar of His own laws (Matt. v. 17). His command is also an invitation,—"Come, follow me."

Another name of the holy Child is "God." The soul of Him was God Himself; so that the child was wholly different from any other child that ever was

or ever will be born. "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him" (Isa. xxv. 9). He is called also "Hero" or "Mighty One," because of His combats with and victories over the forces of evil that were threatening mankind with destruction. And to-day it is true that in every victory of good over evil it is the Lord Jesus Christ to whom alone belongs all the glory and honor; for in reality He is the One who bears the brunt of the battle, though the appearance to us is very different. The "mighty men of valor" of the olden time were but prophetic types of this Hero of heroes. See Ps. xxiv. 8 and Isa. xlii. 13. Still another quality of our Lord is expressed in His name, "Father of Eternity," signifying the fulness of His love. The Lord is "Father" of all, desiring to bless all His children with His own happiness to eternity. Finally, He is called "the Prince of Peace," because this is the end which He ever has in view—perfect peace for men and angels. See the three-fold bestowal of peace, John xx. 19, 21, 26. These, then, are the qualities of the Messiah indicated by His several names—understanding and wisdom, heroic strength, infinite love, heavenly peace. That He came as a Child to bring us those same qualities so far as we will receive them is surely "good tidings of great joy" to all people.

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